

## How to Feel Good When Your Life Isn't Perfect



Most people have thoughts and dreams about how their lives ought to be. When things don't work out the way they had pictured, they tend to blame other people or situations.

They don't realize that the bad feelings come from their own thinking.

"When things are bad, people say to themselves, 'Things aren't the way I like them,' and then say, 'That's terrible, that's awful' -- meaning they think things are so bad that they shouldn't or mustn't be that way," says Albert Ellis, Ph.D., the creator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and author of "Feeling Better, Getting Better, Staying Better."

It's normal, however, to have to deal with difficult situations and difficult people as you go through life.

Here's how to change your thinking, so you can feel good when your life isn't perfect.

### Unconditionally accept yourself

Most people want to do well in order to feel good about themselves and be loved by the significant people in their lives. But this way of thinking can make you feel crazy.

"It's important to accept yourself whether or not you do well and whether people who are important to you love you," says Dr. Ellis. "Don't think, 'I have to do well,' because then, if you don't, you'll worry. Instead, just prefer to do well. Even when people are doing well and being loved by significant people, they worry about tomorrow."

### Don't over-generalize

You can evaluate what you think, feel and do, but don't give yourself a generalized rating. You're like a diamond in the making and have many facets. Some shine brilliantly, and others still need to be polished.

"People generalize and say, 'I failed a few times, and I might fail again.' That's true enough, but then they stupidly over-generalize and say, 'I failed a few times, and I'm a failure.' You can't be a failure or a success," says Dr. Ellis. "But you can fail at things and be successful at things."

Even evaluating yourself as a good person creates stress, because you'll always have to live up to your image and do good things.

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The truth is that you do thousands of things -- some good, some bad.

## Unconditionally accept others

You may get angry with relatives, friends, co-workers or other people because of things they've done. You'll feel far less miserable if you feel disappointed instead.

"You can think, 'I don't like their behavior, but they're fallible humans who sometimes do good and sometimes behave badly. I can accept them and not make myself incensed or furious at them.' " says Dr. Ellis. "You can judge their behavior as bad or wicked, but never judge them, as people, as bad, evil or rotten."

This doesn't mean you should tolerate bad behavior. You can still try to get them to change how they behave, but you can do it without anger.

## Unconditionally accept life

Many bad things may happen to you in your life, but you don't have to view them as terrible, because you can handle them and even be happy in spite of them. Therefore, it's not the bad things that upset you -- it's your view of them.

Feeling bad comes from demanding that something turn out a certain way.

"A demand says, 'I have to have something, or to have something turn out a certain way, and it's terrible and I'm no good if I don't have it,' " says Dr. Ellis. "You don't need life to be good. It's preferable, of course -- highly preferable -- but it's not a necessity."

*Krames Staywell*



## Putting the 'Fun' Back Into Fitness

Top athletes and movie stars have the time and motivation to stay in great shape. The rest of us, though, often find it a challenge to fit fitness into our lives.

"It's a matter of attitude," says Antonia P. Williams, M.S., a personal trainer and nutritionist in Alexandria, Va. "If you view exercise as a chore or punishment, that makes it hard for you to do what's necessary. You'll secretly try to avoid it."

Instead, start thinking of fitness as fun. If it's something you want to do, then you'll figure out ways to find time for it.

For example, if the word "workout" sounds too much like work, think of it as "recreation," says Ms. Williams. "Who said you had to suffer and sweat on a treadmill?"

Use fitness as an excuse to get out and enjoy the beauties of nature -- or as a chance to play with your children or your dog, she says. When you see how much it adds to your life, you'll make time for it.

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It also helps to focus on health, "not vanity," says Ms. Williams. "Looking good is really a short-term goal. As soon as you lose those pounds or get your abs looking tight, you say, 'OK, I'm done.'"

But your health is with you forever. And if you devote a little bit of every day to feeling good, pretty soon you're going to start to look better, too.

## Time out for health

Once you view fitness as a priority in your life, it's easy to come up with ways to fit it in.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Break it up.** If you don't have a half-hour or an hour block of time to exercise, that's OK. Studies show you'll still get benefits by working out for just 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Find two or three such periods during your day.
- **Make an appointment with yourself.** If you're a slave to your schedule, schedule time for fitness on your calendar, too. "Put it in ink," says Ms. Williams.
- **Make it easy on yourself.** Find a place to work out that's close and convenient. "If you have to drive 40 minutes to your gym, you'll soon say, 'The heck with this,'" says Ms. Williams. For ultimate convenience, you can exercise at home with a simple set of hand weights or on a staircase.
- **Do more with less time.** For example, if you're strength training, lift heavier weights for shorter sets with fewer reps. Or, do compound exercises, such as squats, that work several muscles at the same time. Strength-trainers can also save time with "supersets." Simply work back and forth between opposing muscles -- for example, your chest and your back -- without resting in between.

- **Do it early.** If you leave your fitness routine until the end of your day, it'll fall victim to every overlong meeting and traffic delay. "Get out and get going first thing in the morning. That way, it's done -- and it's a great way to start your day," says Ms. Williams.
- **Lunch on fitness.** Instead of spending your lunch hour at your desk or in the cafeteria, brown bag it and take a brisk walk.
- **Make weekends count.** If you struggle to squeeze in short periods of exercise during the week, schedule one hour per day on Saturday and Sunday to build endurance.
- **Double up.** If you simply can't turn off your favorite television show, do floor stretches or step-ups in front of the TV. Grab a hand weight and do some bicep curls while you read your morning newspaper.
- **Work out with the kids.** Bicycle with your children, or, if they're younger, trot alongside them while they bike. When you take them to soccer practice, do laps around the field or climb the bleachers a few times instead of just sitting and watching.
- **Ask a trainer.** Even one or two sessions with a professional trainer can help you assess your needs and figure out how to meet them safely and effectively.

Take a look at your day and ask, "What's in it for me?" says Ms. Williams. "Believe that better health is something you deserve -- and go for it!"

*Krames Staywell*

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## Goal Setting for Everyday Success

In a garden, you plant seeds, nurture them with water and fertilizer, work at keeping the weeds out and trust the plants will accomplish your goal of growing strong and productive. The same processes can be used to plan for progress in your life and work.

"Setting goals gives direction to life," says Jack Ensign Addington, author of "All About Goals and How to Achieve Them." "If you don't have goals, you have no direction. You're going to drift and get nowhere. Setting a goal creates a mold into which the energy of life flows. It's a law of the mind -- that which you can conceive of, believe in and confidently expect for yourself, must necessarily become your experience."

Follow these steps and you'll soon be reaping a bountiful harvest.

### Put it in writing

Writing down your goals is like planting seeds. To do so, write a detailed description of each goal -- the more detailed, the better. Most goals fail to materialize because they're too vague. So, instead of writing "I want a new car," describe your new red convertible with the black leather seats.

Make sure your goals are realistic and not in conflict with each other. You should believe they're attainable.

Next to each goal, write the feeling you hope to get from reaching it. You might want excitement from the red convertible, for instance. A feeling of success or accomplishment may come from the purchase of your first home. Other goals might give you feelings of security, respect, social acceptance, love, fun, happiness, adventure or power.

### Act as if

"Goals should be thought of as already accomplished. Never allow yourself to feel anxious about them. This will impede your progress," warns Mr. Addington.

When you feel in your heart you deserve your goal and will do whatever it takes to achieve it, you have won the biggest battle -- the battle with your mind.

Close your eyes and visualize yourself as if you already have attained the goal and are experiencing the feelings that go along with it. Feel the joy and satisfaction of owning your new home, the prestige of earning a college degree, the excitement of driving a new car.

Then start acting as if you already have achieved your goal. If your goal is a new home, start shopping for furniture. If your goal is to become a lawyer, attend some trials and apply to law school.

### Make daily lists

Now that you're clear about your goals, nurture them. Decide which tasks must be done and the tools and training you'll need to achieve them.

Each evening, ask yourself, "What can I do today to get closer to my goal?" Then make a list of six things to do and schedule time to do them. Don't beat up on yourself if you don't accomplish them all in one day. Simply carry over the unfinished tasks to tomorrow.

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At the end of each day, write down what you accomplished in a notebook or calendar so you can track your progress.

### **Be careful about sharing**

Don't discuss your goals with friends or family members who don't share your enthusiasm. They may cause you to doubt your goal, or they may feel threatened and subtly sabotage your success. Most of the time it's best to quietly go about pursuing goals, only giving people information when a goal will affect their lives. That way, you won't have the added stress of accounting to other people about your progress or making explanations if you change direction.

On the other hand, encouragement can be motivating. You can get it from the people who teach you the new skills you need. They have a personal interest in your progress and will be thrilled about your success.

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*For additional online information and resources regarding maintaining a balanced life, wellness, and emotional well-being, go to <https://www.eapconsultants.com/member-access/> and enter your password.*

*If you do not know your password, send an email to [password@eapconsultants.com](mailto:password@eapconsultants.com) and include the name of your employer.*